

A program guide may include personal communications features. These features extend the television viewing experience by allowing viewers to communicate with others. Communication may be real-time (similar to chat), or it may be delayed (similar to email). There are many possible methods for the settop/receiver to communicate with others. This might include a client/server connection over the cable return path, an occasional path via telephone modem, or an Internet connection. Messages may be entered by any of several means. This may include a wireless keyboard, an on-screen keyboard, and a list of standard messages. A household may have multiple viewers, and each may wish to communicate independently. Viewers may set up identities. These identities may be related to user profiles. The household may also keep a list of the identities of friends and family members in other households. While watching a television show, or while viewing information about a show, the guide may present an option to send a message to the show. This may be directed to individual cast members, producers of the show, the airing network, etc. The guide may also allow the viewer to participate in a real-time discussion with representatives of a television show and other fans. The guide may present an on-screen notification when such a chat session is available. The guide may also present the viewer with an option to rate the show, to participate in a survey, promotion, or contest related to the television show, or to order merchandise related to the show. The guide may also allow the viewer to define groups of individuals from other households. While watching a television show, or while viewing information about a television show, the guide may allow the viewer to rate the show and send that rating to the group of other viewers. It may also allow the viewer to augment that rating with a text comment. In addition to sending a recommendation, one viewer might send a reminder to watch a program to another viewer. A viewer may also send a chat request to a group of other viewers. That chat request might include the program that the viewer is currently watching, and might also give the other viewers the option to tune to the program while entering the chat. A viewer might send a gift to another viewer. For example, the viewer might order merchandise related to a program, and have it sent to another viewer. A viewer may also send a pre-paid pay-per-view authorization to another viewer. This may be an authorization for a specific program, service, or package. It may also be a "gift certificate" for one or more PPV programs, channels, or packages to be selected by the recipient. While watching a television program, the guide may allow a viewer to send a message to another viewer or group of viewers. The viewers may all be watching the same television show, or may all be interested in the same show. This short message would show up immediately on the TV screens of the other viewers. For example, if the Super Bowl is being watched in several households, one viewer may wish to send a cheer after a particularly exciting play. Any of these communications may be directed at other viewers of a similar guide, a recipient of Internet e-mail, or some other electronic communication device. The system will determine the functions available to the recipient, and format the message accordingly. For example, if the viewer sends a pay-per-view gift certificate to an Internet e-mail user, the system may generate a web-based coupon, and provide the URL of that coupon to the e-mail recipient for subsequent retrieval. Conversely, the system may provide some mechanism for Internet users to access similar features via a web site that would generate a similar message terminating on the viewer's guide.